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CSR AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Sowjanya S. Shetty M.¹ and V. Basil Hans²

¹Lecturer & PhD scholar, Poornaprajna College, Udupi, Karnataka State, India.

²Associate Professor & Head of the Department of Economics, St Aloysius Evening College, Mangaluru, Karnataka State.



ABSTRACT:

Women constitute half of the global population and are critical to the economic aspirations of a nation. Development to be complete should involve all sections of the society without any discrimination. Development of a nation without the participation of women, who form a significant mass of the society, will be incomplete. Educational attainment and economic involvement are the key elements in ensuring the empowerment of women. Economic empowerment develops their capability to impact, transform or form a better nation. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) refers to the obligation of an organisation to operate in a

socially responsible manner to ensure a deep-seated change in the marginalised section of the society. In modern days, the corporate sector plays a vital role in initiating developmental programmes for the community. CSR deals with corporate responsibility towards society. It has increased the scope for meaningful intrusion by corporate India towards combating many issues. One area of immersion could be towards empowering women by forming employment opportunities through enterprise foundation. Corporate world now recognises women in every possible area in which it operates. Economic empowerment of women brings about the betterment of the family too as women spend the entire income earned on family requirements which increase the overall impact of the corporate intervention. The significant areas of CSR activities of corporates operating in India are the promotion of livelihood, health care, developing education, protecting the environment and empowering women. This paper attempts to study specifically the CSR of selected companies towards women empowerment in India.

KEYWORDS: CSR, education, ethical, India, women empowerment.

1. INTRODUCTION

India is the seventh largest country, second most populous country having the second largest labour force and one amongst the fastest growing economies of the world. India encounters enormous challenges in the process of development, various issues like poverty, illiteracy, sanitation,

gender inequality, disaster management, women empowerment, infrastructure development, environmental issues and healthcare. Social service is an inherent part of Indian culture and tradition. It is difficult for one single unit to bring about change, as the scale is massive. There is an urgent need for effective partnerships between government, NGOs and the corporate which places India's social development on a faster track. CSR is a notion whereby firms

assimilate business manoeuvres and social concerns with their voluntary and mandatory activities. CSR refers to the accountability to do specific value based activities for the progress of the society through active involvement of management, employees and local communities. Sustainance of CSR activities leads to the

growth of society. CSR activities of the organisation receive recognition from the society for the effort and concern shown towards the development of the deprived class living in the society. CSR activities reflect social commitment, moral responsibilities, ethical practices and compassion towards environmental issues. Most of the leading corporates in India are involved in CSR activities in diverse areas like education, skill development, health, livelihood creation, and empowerment of weaker sections of the society.

2. PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THE STUDY

The study is planned, and it proceeds in the following way:

2.1 Objectives of the Study:

- To examine the role of CSR in the empowerment of women
- To analyse the business benefits of CSR

2.2 Methodology:

The present study is based on the collection of data from secondary sources. Secondary data is from various published and unpublished records, books, magazines and journals, both print and online.

2.3 Conceptual and Operational Framework

2.4 Empowerment:

Empowerment is a multi-dimensional process, which should enable the individuals to realise their identity and powers in all spheres of life. It consists of greater access to knowledge and resources, greater autonomy in making decisions or freeing from the shackles imposed on them by custom, belief and practices in life. A woman is economically empowered when she has both the ability to make and act on economic decisions. To succeed economically, women need the skills and resources to compete in markets, as well as fair and equal access to opportunities. Empowerment liberates women easing their mobility, decision-making capacity, awareness of rights and opportunities. Developmental process without the participation of women, who form a significant chunk of the society, will be lopsided. Empowerment brings about more confidence in people to have control and say over decisions impacting their and the lives of the near ones (Narayan & Babu 2014).

2.5 Promotion of education:

'Achieving universal primary Education' is one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the Government. To achieve MDG Government of India has made Right to Education as mandatory through statutory interventions. These statutory provisions enhance the legal, ethical and moral conduct of all the educational institutions, public and private organisations, and in general people of India. Education has emerged as the most favoured segment for CSR spending followed by community-based development and environmental sustainability for the companies.

2.6 CSR in India:

In recent years, the idea of CSR has increased eminence from all boulevards. CSR denotes a corporation's obligation to all the partakers. The term CSR might be new to India, but the perception of CSR is not new-fangled. Though course acclaimed recently, has been followed since ancient times. Philosophers like Kautilya from India preached and promoted ethical principles while doing business. The concept of helping the poor and disadvantaged was cited in much of the ancient literature and supported by several religions where it has been intertwined with religious laws. It has been incorporated in the various laws where part of one's earnings is donated for the poor and welfare of the community. The Hindu calls it 'dharma', Muslims 'zakath' Sikhs 'dashant'; though the name differs but the concept is embedded in the society from the beginning (Kumar, 2012). Western style of industrialisation grasped India under colonial rule and changed CSR from the 1850s onwards. CSR involves applying the concept of sustainable development to the corporate world. Their growth and

profitability must naturally concern companies that respect and listen to their stakeholders. They must also be aware of the economic, environmental, social and societal impacts of their activities (Kumar 2014).

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The concept of CSR originated in the USA in the 1950s but became popular during the period between 1980-2000 when corporations started identifying and accepting some responsibility towards society (Srivastava, Negi, Mishra, & Pandey 2012).

According to the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO), CSR is, “a management concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and interactions with their stakeholders. CSR is a way in which companies achieve a balance of economic, environmental and social imperatives.” However, CSR is no longer a mere management concept; it is a development concept as part of best practices in the sustainable development paradigm. As Gerard Rassendren and V. Basil Hans (2015) opine, Business ethics and CSR are getting more attention in corporate decisions and consumer choice. CSR emerges through a social discourse that focuses attention on the fact that business enterprises besides making profits for their investors have commitments and responsibilities to society. It has come to the forefront of public discussion only after the Second World War especially since the decades of the 1950s and 1960s and has seen significant progress since then. The concept and practice of CSR have moved ahead from mere philanthropy to strategic social responsibility.”

Carroll (1991) defined CSR as the complete range of duties business has towards the society and discussed four categories of obligations of corporate performance which included economic, legal, ethical and discretionary. Of these, ‘discretionary’ responsibilities referred to the voluntary contribution of the business towards social causes like involvement in community development or other social projects about health and awareness of the masses.

Vogel (2005) defined CSR, or business virtue, as “practices that improve the workplace and benefit society in ways that go above and beyond what companies are legally required to do.”

World Business Council for Sustainable Development defines CSR as “the continuing obligation by businesses to behave ‘ethically’, and contribute to ‘economic’ development while improving the quality of life of the workers and their families as well as of the local community and society at large”.

CSR Activities cover various zones like poverty elimination, promotion of health care, disaster management, skill development, eradication of gender inequality, empowering women, increase access to education etc. Among the various areas of CSR activities Education (including skilling) and Healthcare have been favourites of companies for implementing CSR projects.

Emelyn Bagatsing (2014) opines that CSR can be split us further –

- (i) Ethical CSR
- (ii) Altruistic CSR
- (iii) Strategic CSR:

4. CSR INITIATIVES BY CORPORATES IN INDIA

India has become the first country in the world to make it mandatory from April 2014 for companies with a net worth of over ₹500 crore or yearly sales of ₹1,000 crore plus or those booking net profit more than ₹5 crore to allocate at least 2 per cent of their profits to CSR. The Companies Act, 2013, that replaces nearly six-decade-old legislation governing the way corporate function and are regulated in India, profitable companies with a sizeable business would have to spend every year at least 2 per cent of three-year average profit on CSR works. Public sector companies with a profit of less than ₹100 crore are required to contribute 3 per cent of their income for undertaking such activities.

Table 1.1: Trends in CSR Spending

Years	Prescribed CSR	Actual CSR
2016-17	9275	8446
2015-16	8169	7549
2014-15	7888	5952

Source: India CSR Outlook Report 2017

There is a substantial improvement in the actual CSR spend to prescribed CSR in FY 2015-16. While it was 79 per cent in FY 2014-15, it has increased to 92 per cent (+ 13 per cent) in FY 2015-16 and 91 per cent (-1 per cent) in the last financial year.

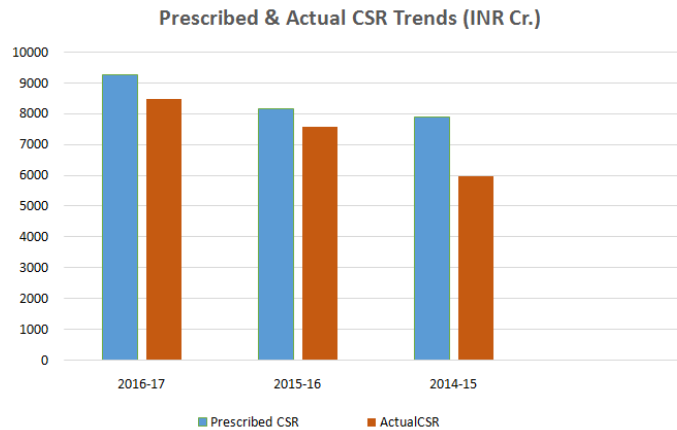


Fig 1.2: Trends in CSR Spending

Fig 1.2 represents the data of 370 Companies listed on BSE or subsidiary of a BSE, having INR Cr or above prescribed CSR in FY 2016-17.

4.1 CSR Initiatives towards Women Empowerment:

Promoting gender equality and empowering women is also one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the country. The Constitution of India ensures equality to all the citizens, but the fact is quite different; in India majority of the people living in poverty and hunger is women (Selvakumar, Arumugam & Abdullah, 2014). Women empowerment is relatively associated with the meaning of "Power". The "Power" enables the women to define themselves. Indian society still looks towards society to grant them power or empower them in various ways. Women empowerment is to empower women in various ways to sustain herself in different fields like finance, social, culture, law, Industry and politics (Kumar, 2019).

Over the past decade, gender equality and women's empowerment have been explicitly recognised as key not only to the health of nations but also to their social and economic development.

4.2 Specific initiatives by some companies to skill, train and empower women:

Empowering women and encouraging their entrepreneurial spirit was a vital aspect of CSR for business houses like the Tatas, Godrej, HUL, Jindals, Vedanta, Hindalco and many others. Companies like Tata steel, over the last 15 years had supported the formation of more than 500 rural enterprises in agriculture, poultry, livestock and community entrepreneurship. It continued to work furthering empowerment by helping the establishment of around 200 women SHGs every year, who were

encouraged to venture into income generating activities. Tata Steel also holds regular competitions for recognising women leaders who could be role models through its programme 'Tejaswini'. Aditya Birla Group to empower women to attain financial independence encouraged the formation of Self Help Groups (SHGs). Extensive training in different vocations is given to hone their skills such as creating bamboo products, knitting, weaving, embroidery, dyeing of fabrics, candle-making, handicrafts, goat rearing, bee-keeping, making of ropes, mushroom cultivation, raising coconut saplings, computer operating, lamination and cosmetology etc that can provide them with a steady source of income.

Infosys organises an annual mela that empowers penniless women and help them earn a livelihood. It is also involved in building orphanages that give children a better life, the Foundation's activities address the needs of society's most neglected. The Foundation also offers an edge to deprived and rural students, through its activities particularly among children, women, elderly and the differently abled, and livelihood enhancement projects; monetary contributions to academic institutions for establishing endowment funds, chairs, laboratories, etc., intending to assist students in their studies.

Forbes Marshall is involved in forming SHGs and credit Co-operative Society for Women. Apart from meeting the financial needs of women through these initiatives, these have also resulted in eliminating child marriages, which were prevalent earlier among the target Villages. Godrej Material Handling business unit organised a series of training programs to train women to operate forklifts. The course started as a gender equality initiative with the vision to encourage more women in the manufacturing sector. This training is opening a new career option for these women. Dastkar is a registered society for improving the economic status of the craftspeople, particularly women to use their traditional crafts skills as a means of employment, income generation and gain economic self-sufficiency. Adhunik Group focuses on empowering local girls and women improving their social condition and thereby making them economically independent. With a focus on SHGs Vocational training programmes are given, includes soap making, envelope making, phenyl making, domestic food products, candle, tailoring, mushroom cultivation, incense sticks, papad making, fishery and vermicompost making and facilitating them to start their enterprises for income generation. The recent commitment of TATA consultancy and Bharathi Airtel spending ₹100 crore each as a part of their CSR to construct toilets for girls in schools in the wake of Governments Swacch Bharath Abhiyan.

5. THE BUSINESS BENEFITS OF CSR

CSR is a commitment to expand the well - being of a society. For most of the companies, CSR is not just charity, but it is a central business tactic of an organisation. CSR has programmed a new device to strive in the market for the companies. CSR is also used as a strategy to improve and increase profit-the most important thing and the main objective of every business. It is a way which strikes a balance between economic, social and environmental imperatives. CSR is not regarded as a drain of resources because the proper execution of CSR benefits the organisations.

Consumers in the era of advanced technology are aware of the company's social initiatives and their worthiness. They also develop a positive attitude towards companies which are doing well towards society (Singh & Verma, 2016). Indian banks no longer see CSR as a charity, but they see it as a way of building their image and marketing their products (Bansal & Rai 2014). The general public now expects companies to make not only excellent products and provide good services but also be good neighbours and socially responsible. Moreover, many companies are increasingly recognising that effective management of environmental and social risks can improve the bottom line by optimising operations and making them more competitive. So they are adopting CSR frameworks (Mutyalu 2015). However, a firm to be involving in both aspects, within the firm and on the outside, will make its products and services more eye-catching to consumers, resulting in more profitability. This initially increases the costs of implementing CSR, but the benefits are sure to offset the costs far. Some important benefits include:

- Access to investment
- Improve stakeholder relationships
- Improves business reputation
- Generates positive publicity
- Acquire more opportunities
- Enhance supply chain security
- Increased sales
- Increase in customer retention
- Maintains a happy workforce
- Differentiates you from your competitors
- Reduction in operating costs

Consumers do not possess the same level of liking or sympathy to different social issues (Rassendren & Hans, 2019). According to Basil Hans (2017), CSR – with all good intentions – is likely to be looked with a lazy gaze. Several studies reveal that there is a low level of responsiveness for CSR, even by the employees. A study conducted in one of the top Multinational IT Sectors in Tamil Nadu, reveals that 46.7 per cent of the employees express a low level concerning CSR Responsiveness, and 43.1 per cent of employees expressed a low level concerning Corporate Ethics. This is not to deny the fact that there is a relationship between CSR expenditure and profits of the firm and the firm size positively affects this relationship. Women, both as strategic partners and beneficiaries of CSR must be alert to safeguard their interests in and from CSR. One in three women experiences some form of sexual or physical violence in her lifetime. This diminishes and demotivates women's spirit further. UN recently initiated “**Me Too**” campaign and many leading women celebrities joined to convey a simple message that women should speak up for them and should live with dignity as this should not mark an end to their life purpose. They have the right to live with 'dignity' and 'respect' after being victimised too (Munet & Mehta 2018). Women must become sustainable soldiers.

6. SUGGESTIONS

There is an immediate need to increase marginalised women's economic prospects by supporting them both morally and financially. CSR is a highway for women. Gender issues and issues of empowerment must be inbuilt to the CSR practice. We suggest –

- Raising consumer awareness about women's empowerment
- Creation of Self-Employment and Women Entrepreneurship Development Opportunities
- Creation of Wage-Employment Opportunities
- Partnership with a large group of women to operate the enterprise jointly
- Fair Wage and Fair Price to Home-based Women workers and their Products
- Mobilising women SHGs
- Awareness of available opportunities
- NGOs to lend a helping hand for CSR in women workplaces and make gender equality part of the company's culture, processes and policies
- Training to SHG members, helping with the selection of appropriate income generating activities individually or in groups
- Assistance to access bigger markets for potential SHG enterprise
- Credit support by linking with banks at affordable cost
- Grants or subsidy to buy inputs for start-up
- Crowdfunding for women empowering projects
- Continuous suggestions and guidance when needed necessary

7. CONCLUSION

Businesses cannot exist in an isle of wealth without thought for the welfare of the society wherein it operates. Corporate houses can provide the push for furthering the progress of women by

improving employment opportunities and increasing their participation in economic activities. To make CSR initiatives more effective, there is a need for creating awareness about CSR amongst the public. Public awareness motivates other corporate houses to join the Confederacy and play an active role in addressing issues such as access to education, health care and livelihood opportunities for many people in India through their innovative CSR practices.

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Sowjanya S. Shetty M.

Lecturer & PhD scholar, Poornaprajna College, Udupi, Karnataka State, India.